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THE DEFENDERS™



I HAVE SHOWN YOU YOUR LONG-LOST PAST, DEFENDER!

NOW TAKE A LOOK AT YOUR FUTURE!

No!

REVEALED AT LAST!
THE SECRET ORIGIN OF NIGHTHAWK!

The mysterious **DR. STRANGE!** The vibrant **VALKYRIE!** The high-flying **NIGHTHAWK!** The incredible **HULK!** Evil-doers **TREMBLE** at the names—for these four form the crux of the greatest **NON-TEAM** in history, heroes called together only when the need arises—to battle **MENACES** that threaten the security—or the very **LIFE**—of the planet **EARTH!**

Stan Lee PRESENTS: THE DYNAMIC DEFENDERS!

STEVE GERBER / **SAL BUSCEMA & JIM MOONEY** / **P. GOLDBERG, COLORIST** / **MARV WOLFGAN**
WRITER / **ARTISTS** / **J. COSTANZA, LETTERER** / **EDITOR**

AS **HULK, VALKYRIE, HER HUSBAND JACK NORRIS, AND DR. STRANGE** LOOK GRIMLY ON, **DAIMON HELLSTROM, SON OF SATAN,** RAISES HIS NETHER-METAL TRIDENT OVER **NIGHT-HAWK'S** SUPINE FORM AND UTTERS A SOMBER PRAYER.

THE RITUAL IS ONE OF **EXORCISM.** THE REASON FOR ITS INVOCATION: **NIGHT-HAWK'S MIND IS NOT HIS OWN.**

HE HAS TURNED ON HIS FELLOW DEFENDERS... ATTACKED THEM WITH MYSTICAL PROWESS HE NEVER BEFORE POSSESSED.



THUS, **DR. STRANGE'S** ASSUMPTION THAT HIS WING-CAPED ALLY IS POSSESSED BY SOME DEMONIC POWER.

RISE, THOU WHOSE PRESENCE CLOAKS THE SOUL OF KYLE RICHMOND! RISE AND BEGONE!!

*LAST ISSUE. -- MARV.

MUSICAL CHAIRS MINDS!

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MOMENTARILY, THE ENTITY SEEMS TO OBEY... SURFACING... TWISTING NIGHTHAWK'S FEATURES IN A VILE LEER.

COULD YOU FEEL MY HATE FOR YOU, STRANGE? CAN YOU SENSE MY AMUSEMENT AS WELL?

I'M NOT WHAT YOU THINK! I CANNOT BE EXORCISED! THIS BODY IS MINE--FOREVER.

YOU'LL SEE-- I'LL MAKE YOU SEE--

WHEN I--



THE RITUAL HAD NO EFFECT WHAT-EVER THAT I CAN DISCERN.

I MAY BE MISTAKEN, STRANGE... BUT IN MY OPINION, NO DEMON IS PRESENT HERE.

NIGHTHAWK'S AFFLICTION STEMS FROM ANOTHER CAUSE ENTIRELY.

MOST PUZZLING, NOT POSSESSION... AND NOT SORCERY, EITHER.

MY OWN INSTINCTS WOULD HAVE RECOGNIZED THE LATTER.



WHAT, THEN, STEPHEN? SOME BIZARRE FORM OF HYPNOSIS-- SOME PSYCHOLOGICAL PROCESS?

AND YET-- COULD THAT ENDOW HIM WITH SUCH POWER?

HULK DOESN'T UNDERSTAND. BIRD-NOSE LOOKS RIGHT. WHY DOES HE HATE EVERY-BODY?

WE'LL PROBE FURTHER, HULK... AFTER I THANK MR. HELLSTROM FOR HIS QUICK RESPONSE TO OUR SUMMONS.

I REGRET I CANNOT STAY ON TO AID YOU, BUT I WISH YOU GOOD FORTUNE, FAREWELL.



AND WHEN THE YOUNG
EXORCIST HAS GONE...

I SHALL REQUIRE
SILENCE FOR THIS
NEXT PROCEDURE.
I SHALL BE ENTER-
ING A TRANCE-LIKE
STATE...

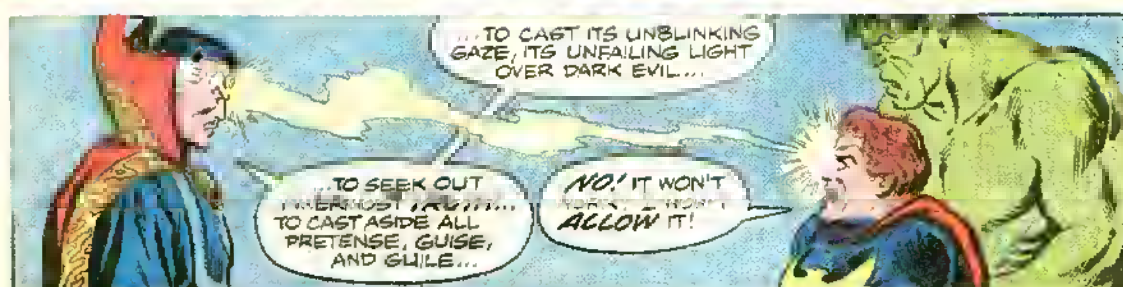


"...FOCUSING ALL MY
ENERGIES UPON MY
AMULET..."

"...CALLING FORTH
THE ULTIMATE
ORGAN OF VISION..."



"...THE ALL-SEEING
EYE OF AGAMOTTO,
TO ILLUME THIS DARK
NIGHT OF THE SOUL..."



...TO CAST ITS UNBLINKING
GAZE, ITS UNFAILING LIGHT
OVER DARK EVIL...

TO SEEK OUT
THE MOST DARK...
TO CAST ASIDE ALL
PRETENSE, GUISE,
AND GUILF...

NO! IT WON'T
WORK! I WON'T
ALLOW IT!

YOU'VE NO CHOICE.
THE EYE SEES
ALL, AND ALL
IT SEES...



...STANDS
REVEALED!!

HUHH?
BIRD-NOSE
HAS NEW
FACE!!

HULK DOESN'T
LIKE THIS FACE!
FACE IS UGLY!
HULK CAN TELL...
FACE HATES
HULK!

THIS IS INSANE!
DOC-- VAL-- I
KNOW THAT FACE!



WHY FROM WHERE? IT WAS... NO, HE WAS ON A STAGE... BUT NOT AN ACTOR... **BLAST!!**



WAIT! I'VE GOT IT! THE VERMONT STATE FAIR!!



VAL--NO, BARBARA-- YOU REMEMBER-- IT WAS ON OUR FIRST DATE!

C'MON, YOU COULDN'T FORGET THAT NIGHT!



B-BUT... I HAVE, I'M AFRAID, COMPLETELY...

ALL OF IT? THE FLAT TIRE?

I...

YOUR FATHER'S THREATENING TO KILL ME, WHEN I COME HOME AT FOUR A.M.? VAL--THE SIDESHOW MAGICIAN??



MAKE YOURSELF REMEMBER! YOU SAID HIS NAME SOUNDED LIKE A CHEAP PERFUME!

CHONDU-- THAT WAS IT! AND YOU SAID HIS ACT HAD THE RIGHT FRAGRANCE FOR HIS NAME!



NO NEED FOR FURTHER SHOUTING, MR. NORRIS. YOUR RECOLLECTION IS CORRECT.

THE MIND WITHIN KYLE'S BODY IS INDEED THAT OF HARVEY SCHLEHER-MAN... KNOWN ONSTAGE AS CHONDU THE MYSTIC.



BUT IF THAT IS SO, THE RIDDLE REMAINS...

WHERE IS BIRD-NOSE?

PRECISELY.

AND, BUT THAT'S A TWO-PART QUESTION. NIGHT-HAWK'S BODY IS JUST WHERE IT SEEMS TO BE. BUT HIS BRAIN...

IT WOULD BE SO EASY... JUST TO GIVE IT A LITTLE SQUEEZE...

NERVOUS, JERRY? GETTING ANXIOUS OVER CHONDU'S LONG ABSENCE? I--NO! IT'S JUST THAT BRAIN FOR MY EXPERIMENTS!

YOU'RE CERTAIN YOU'RE NOT WORRIED SAY, THAT HE'LL NEVER RETURN?

NO!! STOP!!

WELL... SO WHAT IF I AM? SUPPOSE NIGHT-HAWK'S FRIENDS FIND OUT THE TRUTH?

WHY... THEN WE'D HAVE TO CALL ON RUBY... TO DESTROY THEM UTTERLY.

CALL ON WHO...?

OH, MY GOD...

ALLOW ME TO PRESENT THE NEWEST ADDITION TO OUR BAND.

JERRY MORGAN -- MEET RUBY. I BELIEVE YOU'LL AGREE SHE MEETS THE QUALIFICATIONS...

FOR JOINING A GROUP CALLED THE HEAD-MEN!

YOU SEE, "CRYSTAL BALL" IS NOT A MASK.

SHE'S A SCIENTIST,
JERRY, LIKE YOU,
AND A DOCTOR,
LIKE MYSELF.

AND LIKE US BOTH
--AND CHONDU-- SHE
WAS RIDICULED,
JEROME'S
COLLEAGUES AND
THE PUBLIC.

BUT UNLIKE MY WORK WITH
ORGAN TRANSPLANTS AND
YOURS WITH CELLULAR COM-
PRESSION, BOTH OF WHICH
ENDED IN TRAGEDY, RUBY'S
RESEARCH WAS
REVILED.

... FOR ITS
SUCCESS...

"HER HEAD IS AN ORGANIC
COMPUTER, JERRY, COMPOSED
OF MALLEABLE PLASTIC, ABLE
TO ASSUME WHATEVER SHAPE
SHE DESIRES.

PLEASED
TO MEET
YOU, MR.
MORGAN.

OH,
NO...!

AND THIS IS BUT
THE MOST TRIVIAL
OF HER ABILITIES.

WOULD YOU
CARE FOR A
FURTHER
DEMONSTRATION OF--

NO! NAGAN
YOU'VE LOST
YOUR
MIND!!

YOU--I-- CHONDU-- WE'RE
ALL OUTCASTS, BUT AT
LEAST OUR HEADS ARE
HUMAN!

THIS-- WOMAN?.. IS A
MONSTROSITY! A TECHNOLOG-
ICAL PERVERSION!

RUBY DISAGREES,
I SEE. WELL, I'LL
LEAVE YOU TWO TO
ARGUE AMONGST
YOURSELVES.

THUS, WE LEAVE THE WESTBURY, CONNECTICUT, HEADQUARTERS OF THE HEADMEN...

...TO TURN OUR ATTENTION BACK TO THE DEFENDERS AND ANOTHER, VERY DIFFERENT CRYSTAL SPHERE.

THE ORB WILL PLACE US IN DIRECT CONTACT WITH KYLE'S MIND.

HIS OWN PERCEPTIONS WILL REVEAL HIS LOCATION TO US.

BUT WHEN THE MISTS WITHIN THE CRYSTAL PART... THE MYSTERY SEEMS ONLY TO DEEPEN!

A CROSSROADS--IN BLACK SPACE, STEPHEN, WHERE IS THAT?

LOOKS LIKE NOPLACE TO HULK!

ALAS, EMERALD ONE, I FEAR YOU MAY BE CORRECT.

SINCE KYLE SEEMS TO LACK ALL SENSE OF HIS OWN WHEREABOUTS, I SUSPECT WE ARE DEALING WITH A TRANSFER OF BRAINS, NOT MINDS.

SURGERY, NOT SORCERY!

IF KYLE NO LONGER POSSESSES A BODY AND ITS SENSORY ORGANS--

I HAVE A PLAN OF SORTS, BUT I SHALL

AND, MR. NORRIS, ARE YOU WILLING...?

ME? WELL... SURE, I GUESS SO.

A SHORT TIME LATER, THE FULL
COMPLEMENT OF DEFENDERS
TAKES TO THE SKIES....!

WHERE IS MAGICIAN
LEADING
HULK TO?

TO NIGHTHAWK'S
BRAIN, HOPEFULLY--
SO THAT WE MAY SOME-
HOW REPLACE IT
IN HIS SKULL.

EVEN I FIND IT
DIFFICULT TO IMAGINE
THE HORROR OF HIS
PRESENT STATE... BODI-
LESS, IMMOBILE, WHOLLY
TURNED WITHIN.

CHAPTER
II

MY LIFE AND TIMES (GOOD and BAD)

AS TOLD BY THE BRAIN OF KYLE (NIGHTHAWK) RICHMOND

"THIS JUNCTION
WITH ITS FOUR
PATHS TO CHOOSE
FROM (SIX, IF YOU
COUNT UP AND
DOWN) WAS
HARDLY AN
UNUSUAL
PLACE TO
FIND MYSELF.

"NOR WAS IT SURPRISING
THAT DEATH SHOULD
CONFRONT ME HERE...
NOR THAT HIS INSTRU-
MENT OF VENGEANCE
SHOULD BE MY
NAMESAKE,
THE HAWK.

"THE FACT IS, AND I FREELY ADMIT IT: I'VE ALWAYS CAUSED MYSELF MORE PAIN THAN OTHERS HAVE CAUSED ME."



"ODDLY, THOUGH, THIS TIME I SEEMED NUMB TO THE HURT."



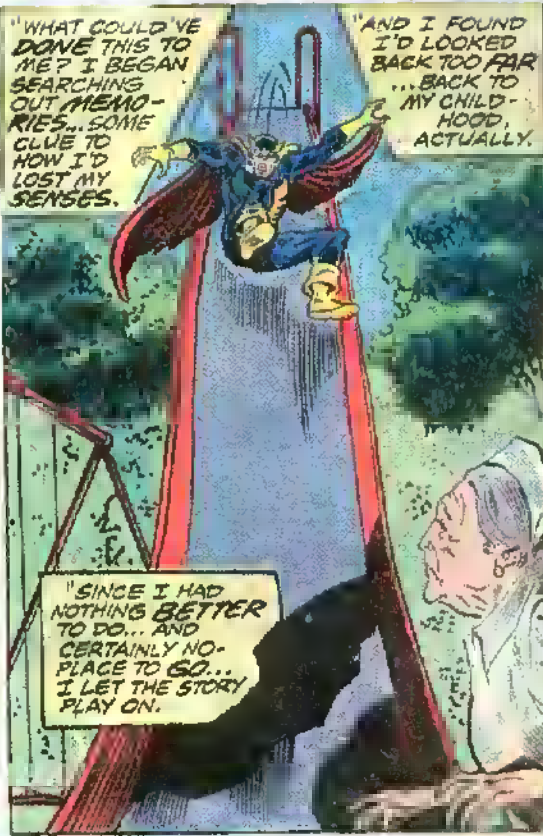
"AND WHEN DEATH SWUNG ITS SCYTHE..."

"IT PASSED RIGHT THROUGH ME AS IF I WEREN'T ALIVE TO FALL VICTIM TO ITS BLADE."

"BUT I WAS ALIVE..."

"...WASN'T I?"

"OR WAS I?" IT OCCURRED TO ME SUDDENLY THAT I HADN'T BEEN VIEWING THIS SPECTACLE WITH MY EYES--THAT INDEED MY EYES HAD VANISHED. I SCREAMED, BUT MADE NO SOUND--OR NONE THAT I COULD HEAR. I REACHED FOR MY FACE--AND FELT NOTHING. I WASN'T THERE."



"WHAT COULD'VE DONE THIS TO ME? I BEGAN SEARCHING OUT MEMORIES... SOME CLUE TO HOW I'D LOST MY SENSES."

"AND I FOUND I'D LOOKED BACK TOO FAR... BACK TO MY CHILDHOOD, ACTUALLY."

"SINCE I HAD NOTHING BETTER TO DO... AND CERTAINLY NO PLACE TO GO... I LET THE STORY PLAY ON."

"NATURALLY, THAT INVOLVED REVISING MY IMAGE OF MYSELF TO FIT THE SCENE..."

...WHICH I MANAGED EASILY.

"THERE'D BEEN AN ACCIDENT, AND MY MOTHER WAS THE VICTIM. BEING THE MAN OF THE HOUSE WHILE DAD WAS AWAY (DAD WAS ALWAYS AWAY) I GOT TO WATCH AT HER BEDSIDE..."

"...AS SHE DIED."

"TRUE, TRUE... AND THE SORT OF STABILITY I WAS IN FOR SHOWED ITSELF AS SOON AS DAD'S LIMOUSINE PULLED AWAY AND I LET MYSELF SHED A TEAR."

CRY BABY!
CRY BABY!!

VEN
ING
HOO
OYS

"MY GOVERNESS--I'M A RICH KID, REMEMBER?--WAS DEEPLY UPSET. I ASKED HER WHY SHE DIDN'T ANSWER."

"SHE JUST CRIED...AND TOOK MY HAND...AND LED ME AWAY."

"DAD MADE IT BACK FROM EUROPE FOR THE FUNERAL, AT LEAST. AND IN TIME TO MAKE A DECISION ABOUT MY FUTURE."

YOU KNOW HOW IT IS, KYLE... I'M CONSTANTLY ON THE MOVE...

YOU'LL BE BETTER OFF HERE AT WEST-HAVEN. IT'LL BE MORE STABLE FOR YOU.

"I THINK THAT'S WHEN I FIRST LEARNED THERE WAS NO PERCENTAGE IN LETTING YOUR FEELINGS SHOW."

"IT WAS ALSO MY FIRST FIGHT."



"I KNEW DAD'S GENEROSITY WOULD ASSURE ME A SPOT AT THE COLLEGE OF MY CHOICE."

"GRAYBURN WAS A QUIET SCHOOL IN UPSTATE NEW YORK, ONLY A FEW THOUSAND STUDENTS. I HAD MY OWN CAR, A LITTLE FREEDOM TO MOVE..."

"I WAS RIGHT."


"AND SOMEONE TO MOVE WITH: HER NAME WAS MINDY. AND YEAH, I GUESS, I MIGHT'VE BEEN IN LOVE WITH HER. I KNOW I WANTED TO BE."

"SHE WAS GOOD FOR MY ATTITUDE. I ACTUALLY DECIDED TO TRY CRACKING A BOOK FOR ONCE."

"BUT ALL THOSE YEARS I'D SPENT PROTECTING MYSELF INSTEAD OF STUDYING HAD TAKEN THEIR TOLL."

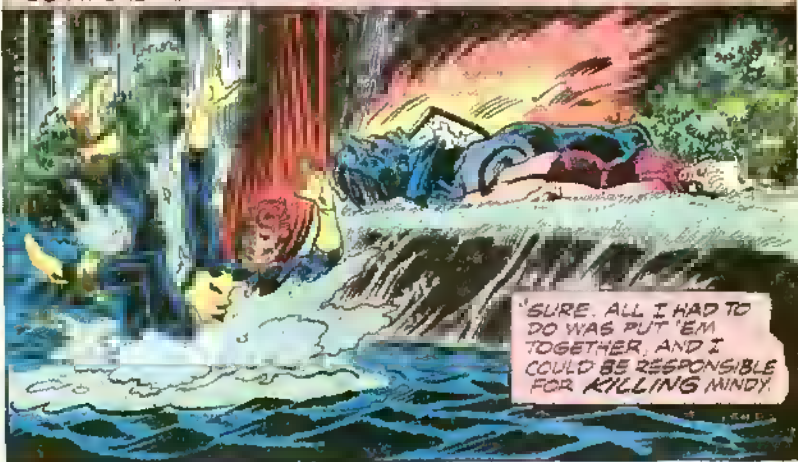
"FROM THE FIRST WORD OF THE FIRST LECTURE..."

"...I WAS SWAMPED."



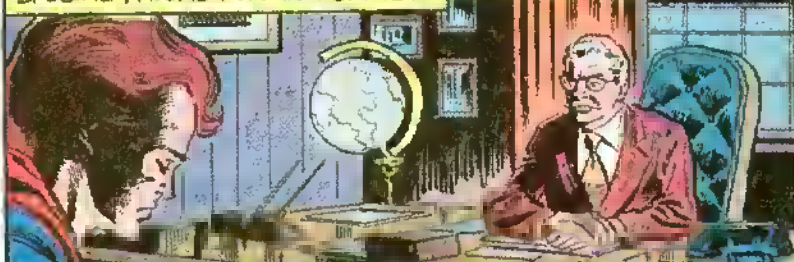
SO IT WAS BACK
TO MY USUAL
STATE: FREE-
FALL, WITH
NOTHING TO GRAB
ONTO... AN EMPTY
PAST... NO
FUTURE I
COULD PICTURE...
BUT I DID HAVE
MY OWN CAR...

"SO AT LAST I HAD THE MEANS TO WRECK MY HEAD COMPLETELY."



"SURE. ALL I HAD TO
DO WAS PUT 'EM
TOGETHER, AND I
COULD BE RESPONSIBLE
FOR KILLING MINDY."

"THE DEAN OF MEN DIDN'T BELIEVE IN SHOUTING... OR IN
SPECIAL FAVORS FOR RICH BRATS."



"I'D BLOWN
IT THIS
TIME."



"DAD OFFERED TO
PULL SOME STRINGS
... BUT I TOLD HIM TO
TAKE HIS BALL OF
TWINE, AND WHATEVER
I GOT, I DESERVED."

"I GOT
EXPELLED."

"I ALSO GOT MY DRAFT NOTICE... ALMOST AS SOON AS
I'D STEPPED OUT THE DEAN'S DOOR IT SEEMED."



"MY
FATHER
AND THE
SCHOOLS
HAD
FAILED..."

DEAN
OFFIC

"NOW IT WAS
UNCLE SAM'S
TURN TO TRY
TO MANAGE
MY LIFE."

"AND
I WAS
OLD
ENOUGH
TO
DRINK."

"I FIGURED HE'D SHIP ME TO ASIA, PUT ME IN THE WAY OF A BULLET, AND THAT WOULD BE THAT."

"I FIGURED WRONG. THE DOCTOR'S DETECTED A HEART MURMUR. AND FASTER THAN YOU CAN SAY 'Q-F'...

SORRY, YOUNG MAN. CAN'T USE YOU.

"...I WAS OUT ON THE STREET AGAIN."

"AND THE JOKER I'D EXPECTED... MAYBE EVEN HOPED-- TO MEET IN THE JUNGLE WAS THERE WAITING."

"BUT NOT FOR ME. NOT YET. HE JUST WANTED TO SHOW ME SOMETHING."

"YES, FOLKS, ON THE VERY DAY THE ARMY TOLD ME THEY DIDN'T NEED MY BODY FOR TARGET PRACTICE..."

"...OLD SKULL-FACE SAW TO IT THAT MY LAST OBLIGATION TO ANY OTHER HUMAN BEINGS WAS WIPE OUT."

"NO. THE PLANE DIDN'T REALLY CRASH IN FRONT OF ME. IT HAPPENED AT JFK. BUT I SAW NEWS FOOTAGE OF IT THAT NIGHT."

CHOOO!!!

"SOME DIPLOMAT HAD BEEN ON BOARD THAT FLIGHT. SO HAD MY FATHER."

"PENNYSWORTH, DAD'S RIGHT-HAND MAN, ATTENDED THE FUNERAL WITH ME."

YOU RICHMOND ENTERPRISES IS YOURS NOW, KYLE. AND THERE ARE DECISIONS TO BE MADE.

YOU MAKE 'EM, THEN. YOU KNOW THE BUSINESS-- I COULDN'T CARE LESS.

"SO I ABDICATED THE THRONE OF MY FINANCIAL EMPIRE-- AND DIVIDED MY TIME BETWEEN JET-SETTING AND FINDING A CURE FOR MY HEART MURMUR. THE FIRST WAS A BORE."

"THE SECOND, WITH THE HELP OF THE GRANDMASTER, LED TO MY DISCOVERY OF THE SERUM THAT DOUBLED MY STRENGTH AFTER SUNDOWN."

"I ASSUMED THE IDENTITY OF NIGHTHAWK. FIRST FOR KICKS. AS A VILLAIN WITH THE SQUADRON SINISTER."

"...THEN AS A HERO WITH THE DEFENDERS."

"AND THROUGH IT ALL... MY LIFE CONTINUED TO FALL APART. IRISH STARR, DISFIGURED BY A BOMB PLANTED IN MY CAR. PENNYSWORTH, FINANCING THE SONS OF THE SERPENT WITH MY MONEY."

"MY LIFE AND TIMES. TWENTY-EIGHT YEARS... AND WHERE HAS IT GOTTEN ME? YOU WANT THE TRUTH?"

"I'M STILL THAT NINE-YEAR-OLD KID WHO WAS LEFT AT WESTHAVEN..."

"MORE ALONE THAN EVER, RIGHT NOW, IN FACT."

"AND I'M BACK AT THE CROSSROADS."

"I'M STILL A TROUBLEMAKER... STILL HOT-TEMPERED... STILL LOOKING FOR SOMEONE TO BE MY FATHER... STILL ALONE."

"THE SAME CROSSROADS I'VE STOOD PARALYZED AT ALL MY LIFE."

"AND I STILL CAN'T REMEMBER HOW I GOT HERE."

CHAPTER

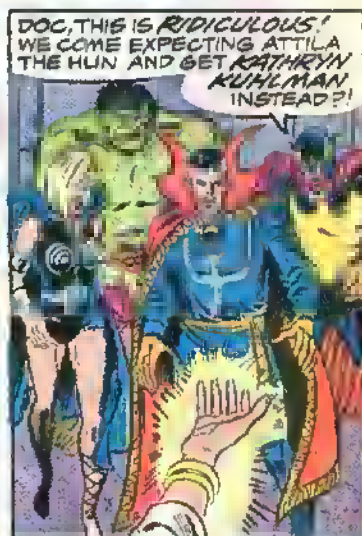
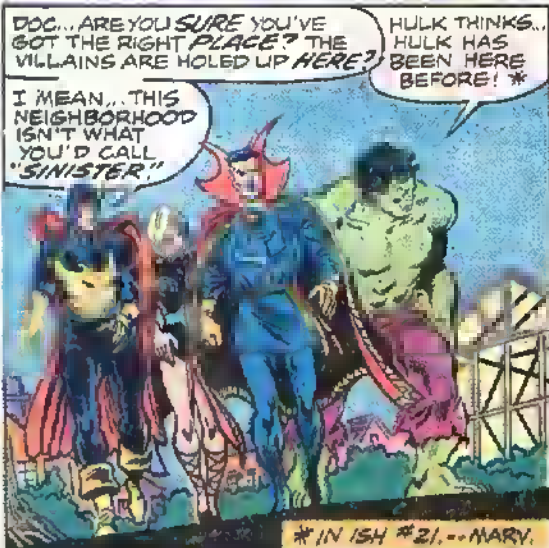
III

"STEP INTO MY PARLOR..."

WESTBURY, CONNECTICUT: IT'S EARLY MORNING. THE KIDS ARE PACKING OFF TO SCHOOL. HUSBANDS ARE RACING TO THEIR CARS FOR THE DAILY CRAWL INTO MANHATTAN AND THEIR OFFICES.

AND THE DEFENDERS DESCEND ON AN OTHERWISE PEACEFUL, DESPERATELY ORDINARY SUBURBAN DRIVE.

THE RESULT, NATURALLY ENOUGH, IS BLIND PANIC.



AND THE THOUSANDS
OF GLASSLIKE FRAG-
MENTS OF THAT
"LIVING GRENADE"...

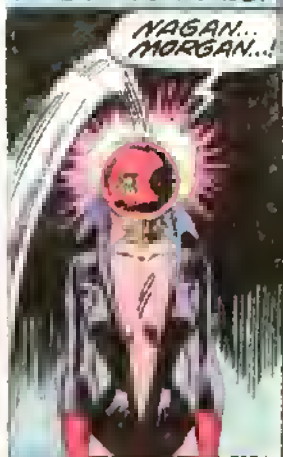


... COME ROLLING
BACK ACROSS THE
CARPET...



...TO MERGE IN
A COHERENT
AND FAMILIAR
SHAPE...

... WHICH THEN DE-
POSITS ITSELF BACK
IN ITS PROPER PLACE.



NAGAN...
MORGAN...

WHAT? WHAT
IS IT? WHY...?



THE CREATURES FROM THE BROWN
LASOON... "BAMBI" GOES
BERSERK... THE BATTLE FOR
NIGHTHAWK'S BRAIN... ALL IN
THE STORY WE CALL...

**WEBBED HANDS,
WARM HEART!** 00